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ABSTRACT

A systematic model for accelerating the process of developing the word decoding skills and building the vocabularies of bilingual adults was used among prison populations in Rockland County, Dutchess County, Suffolk County, and Essex County, New York, as well as in work-study programs in community centers in New York City. Literacy levels of the subjects ranged from nonreaders to fourth grade reading ability. Many spoke some English but were not equipped with vocabulary for job training. Students were trained to locate, independently, the number of syllables in printed words, known and unknown. These efforts were supported by visual aids, large enough to be hung on a wall. Tutorial aids were cassette tapes with individualized lessons, workbooks containing individualized lessons matched to the corresponding cassette tape, and vocabulary enrichment books containing basic words and phonetically simple words. The plan used was a systematic, cumulative, spiral approach to word decoding that provided for development and enrichment of vocabulary and comprehension at a more accelerated pace than permitted by traditional methods of word attack. (HCD)

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EFFECTIVE METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING BEGINNING READING IN ENGLISH TO BILINGUAL ADULTS

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Introduction

"The typical dropout reads at only about 3rd or 4th grade level and has a poor self image caused by years of failure and frustration in the classroom." (N.Y.C. Board of Education, Frank Macchiarola, 1979). These dropouts include both monolingual and bilingual populations.

As Carmen Perez, Director of Bilingual Program of New York State pointed out, theorists can sit and talk to each other and agree that something must be done about remediating functional literacy among adult populations, but what is needed is a practical model for doing so. Traditional methods have failed for the populations considered here.

Background

A current model for accelerating the process of developing a systematic word decoding skill while building an extensive vocabulary was used among prison populations in Rockland County, Dutchess County, Suffolk County and Essex County, as well as with work-study programs in community centers in New York City. Although their situations differed in location and status in life, they presented similar problems. On the level of literacy, subjects ranged from non-readers to 4th grade reading ability. They had poor coping skills and study techniques. They were ill

informed of community resources available to them. They spoke some English but were not equipped with vocabulary for job training. They had poor sight word vocabulary to read job manuals and had no workable word decoding skill to unlock unknown words. Since many of the words contained in their listening and speaking vocabulary were not job related, this was an obvious handicap. They were in need of literacy skills to go hand in hand with vocational skills.

Problems encountered in both oenal institutions and community centers included short time span. In the penal institutions the time span ranged from one to twenty-four months. There was need for individual approaches to literacy training since inmates did not enter the penal institutions at the same time, nor was their length of stay the same. This was similar to work-study community center programs. Lack of job training skills seems to be a significant factor on the rate of recidivism, which is about 80%. There is little hard data concerning programs that have worked in situations such as the ones described here in providing an accelerated method for developing functional literacy. Lack of materials and lack of funding for these types of programs compounds the problem. In one case, internal administrative problems caused the inmate program to be deprived of needed educational services.

A review of the literature confirmed the scarcity of bilingual programs with systematic instruction in the first and second languages of the inmates. Moreover, structured, sequential, cumulative literacy programs are desperately needed if we are to ameliorate the rate of recidivism. Though the present authors would agree with the assumption that: "one cannot give linguistic answers to social problems," (C. Bratt Paulston, 1978), one can indeed posit that given more options through literacy, the adult would be equipped with the means for social upgrading.

Studies in sociolinguistics (Cazden et al., 1972, Bratt Paulston, 1973, 1978 and Gardner, 1980) reinforce the assumption that the teachers' sensitivity and knowledge of how minority populations function with other sociolinguistic rules going beyond verbal expression into the non-verbal domain entail other sociolinguistic rules of communicative competence. The student must adjust his ways and reactions to cultural interference to a degree in which that individual may function in the new society. It is to this end that Wallace Lambert identifies the need for pursuing "some cognitive and socio-cultural consequences of becoming bilingual." (197) The problem of code switching is a complex one for the bilingual student who thinks in his native language and then must switch the code, or words, in order to express himself in English. The individual must accept himself as a person of worth

who can make a contribution to himself and humanity.

Studies in psycholinguistics and ethnolinguistics (Goodman, Padilla et al.) have treated language processes, systems and models of language acquisition and development; nonetheless, one fails to find a step by step sequence describing a process to getting limited English proficiency populations to a level necessary for passing the G.E.D. examination. We are always left with the dilemma that "ethnolinguistic minority groups face insurmountable pressures which can make them hesitant to become full-fledged members of two cultiral communities and that indeed, little has been done." (Lambert, p. 26) More studies must emerge in paralinguistics, examining cultural norms (Hall, 1978 Ninecurt, 1978) to enable populations to "switch cultural channels," realizing, for example, that among Hispanics, while talking in a group, interruptions are allowed without excusing oneself for interrupting. After the one who has interrupted is (partly, sometimes) through, the other person continues. (Nine Curt, op. cit.)

Methodology

Phonics is a traditional method of teaching word decoding, linking sound-symbol relationships to unlock the unfamiliar word. It has been found lacking because of certain inherent limitations and the many exceptions to the given rules in its application. Examples of limita-

tions are found in word attack skills such as configuration where the shape of the word should give a strong hint to the word itself. But "saw" has the same shape as "was" in that both words are made up of three letters and form a rectangular shape. "Picture words," the word conjures up a mental picture, "tree" conjures up a picture of a tree in the mind. But the letters must first be decoded to read the word "tree" before the mind can get the mental image, and words such as "while," "what," "though" do not form pictures in the mind. The rule for structural analysis suggests that the person look for prefixes, suffixes, affixes, or root words in the unknown word. But it is difficult to see how the person can do this unless he first recognizes the word. Word patterns such as "lick," "sick," "trick" which contain the "ick" pattern is thought by some to help the student fix the word in his mind. However, it can be readily seen that there are few words containing this word pattern and this word pattern, when it is found, is in very elementary reading.

The plan used in this study was a systematic, cumulative, spiral approach to word decoding which provided for development and enrichment of vocabulary and comprehension at a more accelerated pace than the traditional methods of word attack permits.

Sample and Data Source

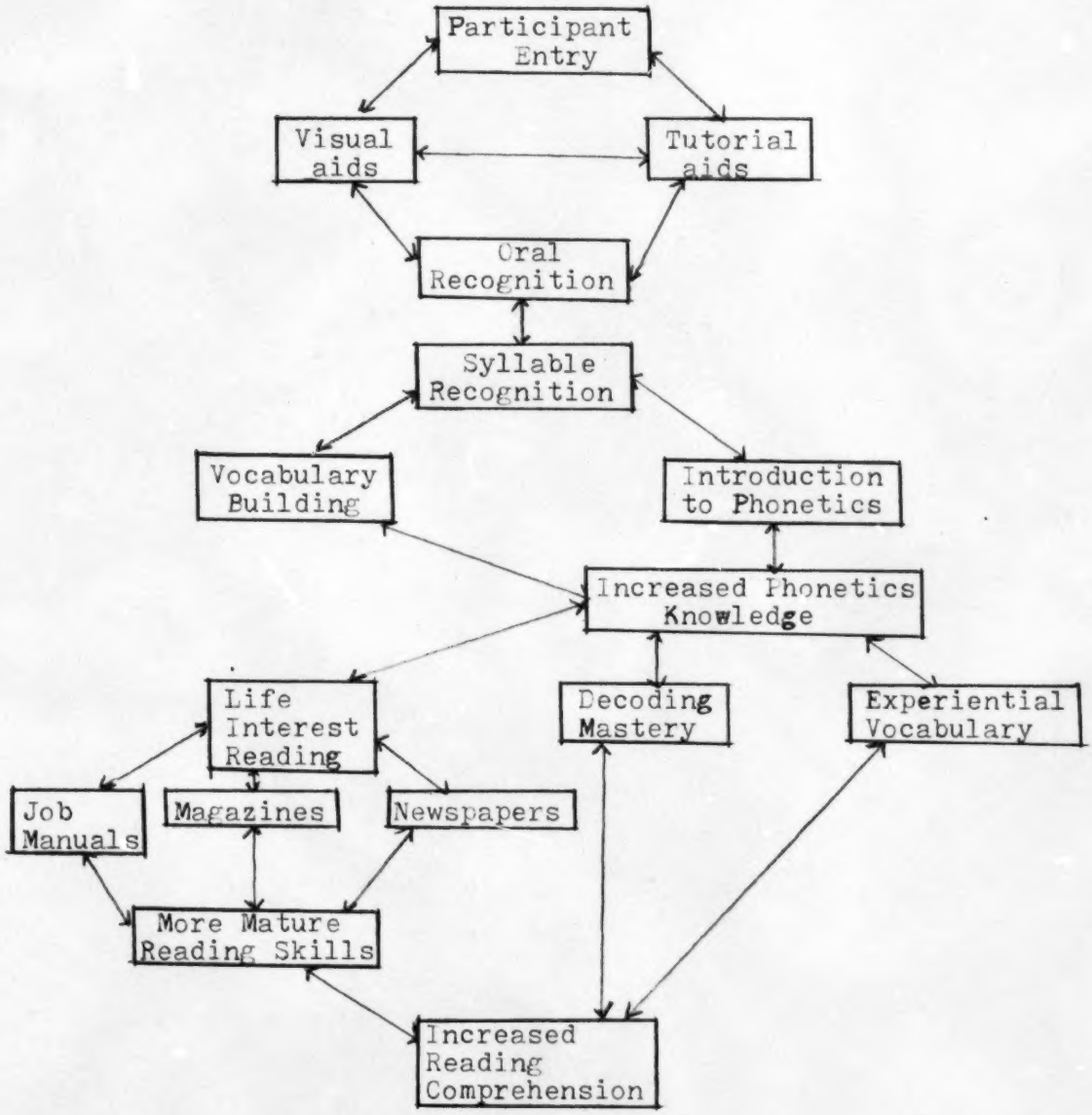
There are two types of difficulties in comprehending the printed page. One is that the student is able to decode the words on the page but brings no comprehension of their meanings. The other type problem is that the person is unable to decode the word on the page. To determine which type problem the students in this study had, a quick diagnostic test was given. The test contained sample words taken from a cumulative listing of words found in 8th grade basal readers. The teacher randomly selected ten words from this listing. If the students missed decoding six out of ten words, it was determined that his problem was that of word decoding.

It is assumed that a student reaching 8th grade reading ability has developed a workable word decoding skill for unlocking unfamiliar words. It is also assumed that a person being able to pronounce a word does not necessarily know its meaning. The necessity of any person having to look up a word in the dictionary to ascertain the meaning of the word is the basis for the second assumption.

The next step was to train the student to locate, independently, the number of syllables in printed words, known and unknown. He was trained to apply basic rules which admitted no exceptions. The rules were: (1) When there is only one vowel in the word, there is only one syllable in the word (c<u>u</u>p). (2) When two vowels come together in a word, count it as one vowel sound, one syllable (b<u>oa</u>t). (3) When <u>e</u> comes at the end of a word, do not count it (home). (4) When <u>r</u> comes right after a vowel, count it as part of the vowel (c<u>ar</u>). (5) "w" is a vowel when it is not the first letter in the word or part of a consonant blend which are d<u>w</u>, s<u>w</u>, t<u>w</u> (c<u>ow</u>). "y" is a vowel when it is not the first letter in a word (t<u>oy</u>).

Table 2

Grid of the Systematic Approach to Word Decoding



As is outlined in the grid, the participant entering the program was supported by visual aids which were composed of three charts, large enough to be hung on a wall so that they would be in constant view in case the student faltered in remembering

sound-symbol relationships. One chart contained the letters of the alphabet; the consonants had pictures under them related to their initial sound (k had a picture of a key under it), the vowels had no picture, enabling the student to quickly locate the vowels. The second chart contained listing of consonant blends with pictures related to initial consonant blend sound (bl had a picture of a blanket under it), the third chart contained the vowels, digraphs and diphthongs with helpful pictures (ar had a car under it). Tutorial aids were cassette tapes with individualized lessons, workbook containing individualized lessons matched to the corresponding cassette tape, and vocabulary enrichment book containing basic words and phonetically simple words.

Each lesson proceeded along the same way, providing for a systematic, cumulative, spiral approach intended to accelerate mastery of word decoding and comprehension. The student was first taught to recognize and apply consonant sounds, consonant digraphs, consonant-vowel blending and finally independent word recognition mastery. An example of consonant recognition development and application is applied to consonant "n," for example.

In the first step, wc ds beginning with "n" sound was given: nail, napkin, nickel. These words provided for "hands-on" experience and could be extended to compre-

hension and expansion: nail as used in carpentry and building, among other things. "Brain storming" was applicable here.

In the second step, the word was removed and different pictures were given. The student was to think of things that match the pictures, the name of the picture beginning with "n". "Net" and "needle" were the pictures provided. In the third step, the pictures were removed and words were given with "n" contained in different places in the words. The student recognized the sound-symbol relationship for "n" and was introduced or reacquainted with more vocabulary words: nerve, banner.

The next step gave a passage which was read to the student by the tape and contained words with "n". The passage meaning was discussed through the tape, further vocabulary was built and expanded upon, leading questions were proposed for consideration by the student. He was asked to recall the sounds of the "boldfaced letters" in the workbook. These contained consonants previously presented, as well as "n". If a consonant sound had not been mastered, one of the visual aids was helpful here as prop for recall.

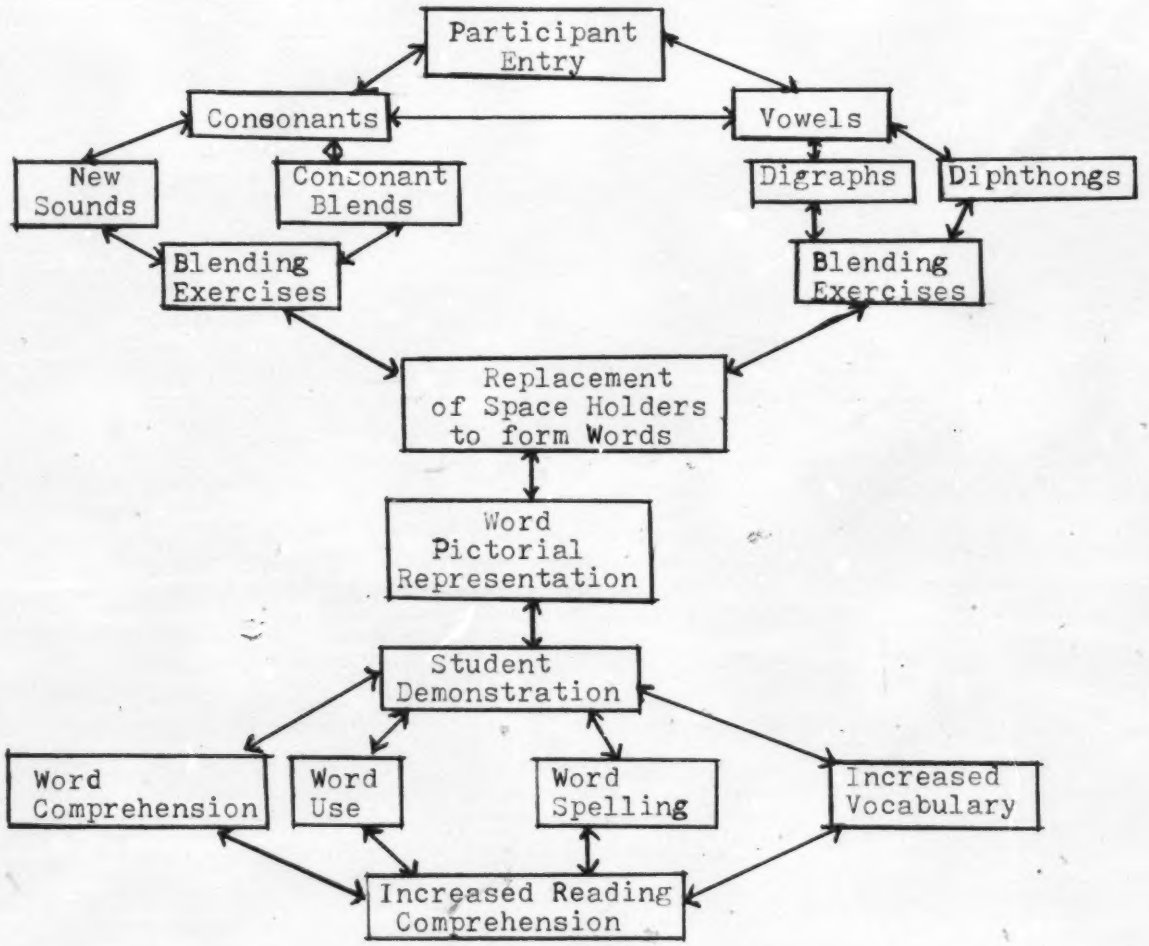
The student was instructed to look through some books or printed materials and find words containing "n", which he was to list. Life interest reading contained in job

manuals, magazines, and newspapers were explored. Examples of words found come from a mechanics manual: "thrown," "against," "chances," "fastened," "motion." Vocabulary words coming from survival materials included "noticeably," "winter," "reason," "energy," "conservation." Vocabulary words coming from materials on consumer interests included "consumer," "name," "information," "suggestion," "complaint." Words coming from a job application bland included "application," "person," "employment," "neatly," "directions." These words were pulled out by the student and provided for "hands-on" demonstrations or explanations, without the strain of having to remember words as sight words. The student brought the list of words to the teacher, the teacher pronouncing the word found by the student and providing an explanation of its meaning and application, if the student did not have the background for comprehension of word meaning.

Each lesson was concluded by having the student find the number of syllables in the words found, or presented on the lesson page of the workbook. As he progressed he was taught how to blend the syllables together to form the word.

Table 3

Grid to Independent Word Mastery



After the student had been introduced to consonant sound-symbol mastery, he was ready to learn how to combine consonant sounds with vowel sounds to form words. In a continuois development of consonants, consonant blends, new sounds (church), blending exercises were combined with vowel, digragh, diphthongs sound-symbol relationships. As an example, the student was taught that the a sound in say has the same sound as the a sound in name. In blending "a..e," "ba..e." "ca..e," "da..e," the student was shown to replace space holders with a sound symbol to form different words, such as "a..e," ace," acre," and "bai...," bail, "bait." Words that could be pictured were accompanied by pictures. Students demonstrated comprehension of word meaning through using it correctly in a sentence, spelling it, using it in connection with other words. This built reading comprehension and formed a background for more intensive reading.

The student was further helped to develop self reliance by looking for and obtaining a job. This was more easily accomplished in community centers. In penal institutions the student was given vicarious job experiences.

Results

The summary results of this practical model is that it has been effective in the different areas in which it has been employed to develop a systematic word decoding skill

which is cumulative and spiral and enables the individual to develop mastery at an accelerated pace. It was immediately applicable to printed material relevant to the individual. What is needed now is for more intensive research to be carried out to determine the range of practical application and extension. This paper has dealt with a practical model rather than a statistical summary of findings on subjects.

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